

Korean Railway Workers' Union Announces Plans to Strike beginning 9 December

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Korean Railway Workers' Union (KRWU) Strike News 1

KRWU Announces Plans to Strike beginning 9 December, 9:00am

The ITF-affiliated Korean Railway Workers' Union (KRWU) has announced its plans to go on strike against rail privatization. On December 3, KRWU President Myoung-hwan Kim held a press conference in the main meeting hall of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and declared the union's plan to go on strike beginning at 9:00am on 9 December. During the press conference, the union announced its demands that 1) the Korail Board of Directors meeting to decide on the establishment of a new Suseo KTX operating company be stopped, 2) the government's unilateral pursuit of rail fragmentation and privatization be stopped, and 3) a framework for national assembly debate and social dialogue on a policy for rail reform aimed at the advancement of public rail be established. The union affirmed its plans to go on strike should these demands not be met before December 9.

During his press conference speech, President Kim commented, "It is all too clear that if the Suseo KTX is separated from the Korail, the next step will be privatization with the goal of profits for private capital. The result of this will be a worsening of the financial circumstances of the Korail. Following, the government plans to separate freight transport, rolling stock maintenance and infrastructure maintenance from the Korail, leading the way to private involvement in these areas as well. The government also plans to open operation of 8 local lines to private tendering." Referring to President Park Geun-hye's recent trip to France, President Kim also commented, "While she made promises not to pursue rail privatization during her elections campaign, in France Park Geun-hye promised to open the rail and subway markets to foreign capital.

"President Park must keep her commitments to the Korean people," he concluded.

Following President Kim, Sang Moo Lee, President of the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions (KPTU) to which the KRWU is affiliated, spoke emphasizing that

lessons of UK rail privatization. "We can see from the UK case that fragmentation and privatization leads to increasing fares and safety risks, the reduction of local services and increase in the railway's deficit," he noted. After him, KCTU President Seung-cheol Kim calling the KRWU's strike, "just and legal" and announced KCTU's plans to hold solidarity strikes in support.

Through a video message ITF Rail Secretary Chair Oystein Aslasken promised ITF plans to coordinate solidarity actions including a day of action and sending a delegation of representatives from ITFs and its affiliates to South Korea to monitor the government and employer's response to the strike beginning on December 11.

Some Korail Officers Express Sympathy for KRWU's Demands

Railway workers' rage at the government's rail privatization plan is spreading through the country. This anger has grown more intense since Korail CEO and President Yeon-hye Choi bent to the government pressure and made clear her attentions to move forward with the splitting off of the Suseo KTX.

Now, around the countries members and officers of the KRWU are committing themselves to protect Korea's public railway. In addition, for the last several days several Korail officials have been posting comments to the KRWU's webpage voicing their opposition to the privatization plan, demonstrating the fact that even Korail management is wary of the government's unilateral policy.

One person using the nickname 'embarrassed,' left the following comment: "There were seafarers who put their lives on the line during Korea's struggle for independence... We must defend the railway! Please don't waiver!" Even leading into the strike there is growing agreement between workers and managers about the problems of privatization.

Building up to the Strike around the Country!

In the build up to its anti-privatization strike, the KRWU held simultaneous protest around the country on November 30. Protests were held in Seoul, Busan, Daejeon, Gwangju and Yeongju. 1800 member participated in Seoul and 7000 around the country. In addition, 922 local support committees around the country are preparing to carry out relay press conferences, religious services and protest visits to government offices around the country to support the KRWU's strike. On the same day KRWU President Myoung-hwan issued instructions to members to begin wearing strike vest to work and holding daytime protest encampments on 2 Dec., extend the protest encampments to 24-hours from 5 Dec. and to stay alert to the strike could begin in full on 9 Dec.

This article can be found at:

[http://www.kptu.net/mboard.asp?Action=view&strBoardID=KPTU_PDSENG&intPage=1&intCategory=0&strSearchCategory=\[s_name\]\[s_subject\]&strSearchWord=&intSeq=11870](http://www.kptu.net/mboard.asp?Action=view&strBoardID=KPTU_PDSENG&intPage=1&intCategory=0&strSearchCategory=[s_name][s_subject]&strSearchWord=&intSeq=11870)

Korean Railway Workers' Union Strike News 2 (Dec. 5)

Support for Rail Strike Grows

Support for the Korean Railway Workers' Union's (KRWU's) strike to stop rail privatization is growing ahead of the December 9 strike start date.

On Dec. 4, the Civil Society Roundtable against Privatization, a coalition composed of 922 NGOs and religious organizations, held a press conference at Seoul Station Plaza. Through the press conference statement, difference organizations confirmed their support for the upcoming rail strike noting, "President Park Geun-hye is lying claiming her plan for rail reform is simply 'the introduction of competition and not privatization, when in fact she has secretly passed the revision of the WTO Government Procurement Agreement, opening the rail industry to foreign capital."

The press conference on marked the start of an assertive campaign by the Civil Society Roundtable in support of the strike, which will include public events and religious services, outreach to the public and protest visits to the related government offices.

Legal Experts, "Unilateral Decision on the Suseo KTX by the Korail Board of Directors - a breach of public trust"

On December 5, the lawyer's organization Minbyun: Lawyer's for a Democratic Society and other civil society organizations held a press conference at the Press Center in downtown Seoul to put forth their professional opinion on the expected decision by the Korail Board of Directors to invest in the establishment of a new Suseo KTX company, which they said would be in breach of the law. In their press statement, they noted, "under the Korea Railroad Corporation Act and the Korail's articles of association, the Korail Board of Directors has the right to refuse to invest in a new Suseo KTX corporation that is being established without the consent of the public and National Assembly. Not to do this would be to be a legal violation of the public trust."

Minbyun called on the Board of Directors to resign their posts rather than participate in the government's privatization plan.

Subway, Cargo Truck, Bus and Taxi Unions Announce Refusal to Provide Replacement Transport during Rail Strike

On December 5, the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions (KPTU) held a press conference at the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions to call for a halt to rail privatization and make a public commitment to solidarity action.

Noting that once the strike is on, the government is likely to call on other transport agencies to run extra services to minimize the strike's impact, the KPTU transport affiliates pledged that they would refuse any requests to perform replacement transport.

The KPTU affiliated participating in this pledge include subway unions, the Cargo Truckers Solidarity Division, the Air and Seaport Transport Division, the Bus Council and Airlines Council.

In addition, the KCTU has announced plans for a solidarity strike protesting privatization and pension cuts and focusing specifically on supporting the success of the KRWU strike beginning on November 11.

KRWU and Korail agree to Negotiations in last Effort to Avoid Strike, Agreement Unlikely

The KRWU and Korail management have agreed to hold negotiations on December 7 and 8 in a last ditch effort to prevent the upcoming railway strike. The KRWU plans to make every effort to reach an agreement that will halt the rush to privatization to make room for social dialogue.

Unfortunately, a breakthrough is not expected. Today, the Korail announced concrete plans to establish a new company to operate the Suseo KTX line by investing in a 41% share. The other 59% will go to the national pension fund - a profit-oriented public fund - or other similar funds. While there has been some debate on the percent share the Korail will hold in the new company, the final decision does not differ substantially from the government's original plan, in which the establishment of the new Suseo KTX company is the first step towards greater fragmentation and privatization of the Korail.

It is clear, therefore, that top-level decision-makers in the Korail have bent to the will of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MoLIT). When the MoLIT's plan first came out in June, the Korail rejected it, stating its position that maintaining full operation of the KTX, rather than creating competition, would be most efficient. This position has now changed to acquiescence.

8th Day of Protest Encampment by Dismissed Railway Workers

For 8 days now, members of the KRWU Committee for the Reinstatement of Dismissed Workers have maintained a protest encampment in front of the Korail headquarters in Daejeon. Every day the committee members, railway workers who have been unfairly dismissed for past actions against rail privatization and restructuring, have carried out outreach to Korail employees on their way to and from work. They have been joined by other unions and civil society organizations in this effort.

According to Committee Chair Gi-tae Kim, the dismissed workers are, "Growing anxious as the strike approaches, but working hard to encourage one another that we will prevail in the end." Kim said that the committee will spend the rest of the time leading up to the strike organizing participation and giving the logistical support needed to prepare.

This article can be found at:

[http://www.kptu.net/mboard.asp?Action=view&strBoardID=KPTU_PDSENG&intPage=1&intCategory=0&strSearchCategory=\[s_name|s_subject\]&strSearchWord=&intSeq=11897](http://www.kptu.net/mboard.asp?Action=view&strBoardID=KPTU_PDSENG&intPage=1&intCategory=0&strSearchCategory=[s_name|s_subject]&strSearchWord=&intSeq=11897)
